

“October is breast cancer awareness month,” the radio voice announced. Never had the word “awareness” pinched me with such poignancy as I helped my wife out of the car and into her bed after returning home from her surgery. I must have heard and read this public service announcement dozens of times, but it had never really hit home with such paralyzing reality as it has these recent weeks.

My wife, Kathy, was diagnosed with breast cancer in late August and underwent a bi-lateral mastectomy on September 22nd. She now faces additional difficult decisions and painful procedures, but she is one of the most fortunate because her type of breast cancer, known as DCIS, is the least likely to migrate. Indeed, her surgeons found no migration of the cancer in her lymph nodes, a near-certain sign she is now cancer-free.

I share our experience, with Kathy’s permission, because I want all of us to become more aware of how serious this disease is.

- One in every eight women will get breast cancer.
- Breast cancer will kill over 40,000 women this year.
- There are slightly more than two million women living in the United States who have been diagnosed with and treated for breast cancer.
- Breast cancer is the leading cancer site among American women and is second only to lung cancer in cancer deaths.
- Breast cancer is the leading cause of cancer deaths among women ages 40-59.

We became more aware of the staggering statistics when they hit our home.

Two weeks before we knew Kathy had cancer, the International Genomics Consortium (IGC) made a presentation to the Board of Supervisors. Three years ago, the board voted to fund the IGC one million dollars a year for five years, so the IGC presents regular reports to the board. IGC researchers right here in Phoenix are characterizing the gene expression of thousands of cancer tumors, including the various types of breast cancer tumors. Their goal is to accelerate the discovery of key genetic signs that can lead to ways to prevent and treat the disease. At the time of the presentation, I was audibly impressed, but was not aware of the personal impact.

Upon hearing of Kathy’s diagnosis, a friend who is a nurse brought a publication to our home called *The Breast Health Resource Guide*. To my surprise, it was published and distributed by Maricopa County. Though this particular pamphlet is no longer available, the Well Woman Health Check division of the Maricopa County Department of Public Health, funded in part by the Susan G. Komen foundation, provides many helpful materials, gratis, to anyone.

“Early detection is the key.” I have heard this phrase over and over. Now, it resonates as it had not before. Kathy and I urge all of you to get examined. This time, don’t let the words slip past you. Be aware--and be alive.